

Peters, Nayokpuk top Iditarod contenders

Native mushers Emmitt Peters, Herbie Nayokpuk and Gerald Riley all have a good chance of winning the 1981 Iditarod scheduled to start this weekend in Anchorage.

Peters, the "Yukon River Fox" from Ruby has the best chance of winning this years race.

In 1975, Peters raced to Nome in 14 days, 14 hours 43 minues and 45 seconds. He won the race and set a record which Joe May from Trapper Creek finally beat last year.

In 1978 Peters placed second against Dick Mackey of Wasilla with a total time of 14 days, 18 hours, 52 minutes and 25 seconds.

In 1979 he raced against Rick Swenson of Eureka and again placed second with a time of 15 days, 11 hours, 19 minutes and 7 seconds.

Last year, Peters had problems with the trail, so he placed ninth, but his total lapsed time was just 5 hours and 5 minutes slower than his 1979 second place time.

Mackey will not be running this year because his duties as 1981 Racemaster will keep him busy coordinating the entire race. May has decided to rest this year as well.

The only Iditarod Champion entered for 1981 who could definitely upset Peters chances for a win is Swenson, who won the 1979 race with a total elapsed time of 15 days, 10 hours, 37 minutes and 47 seconds.

Swenson will, however, also be running against Nayokpuk, the "Shishmaref Cannonball" who placed second in 1980 with a time of 14 days, 20 hours, 32 minutes and 12 seconds. With a good team, Nayokpuk could beat both Peters and Swenson. And then there is Riley from Nenana.

Riley could possibly steal the race from Peters, Swenson and Nayokpuk. Riley won the 1976 race with a total elapsed time of 18 days, 22 hours, 58 minutes and 17 seconds. Since then Riley has shortened his time considerably. In 1977, Riley placed second with a time of 16 days, 16 hours, 32 minutes and 5 seconds. In 1979 Riley took fourth place with a time of 15 days, 19 hours, 29 minutes.